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Section: Disease & Condition-Heart

New Methods For Treating Stroke, Heart Attack Unveiled

Missouri health officials will host a series of public meetings over the next two weeks to discuss a cutting-edge plan for emergency treatment of heart attack and stroke.

Six meetings will be held in cities throughout Missouri, beginning with a 4:30 p.m. today in Jefferson City. Officials with the Department of Health and Senior Services will lead discussions of proposed rules to guide the emergency care system for patients who suffer stroke or a common form of heart attack known as ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction, or STEMI.

The new system is the result of research showing that such patients can often fully recover if they receive the right care within a relatively short time frame. Patients whose treatment was delayed because the closest hospital was not equipped to deal with stroke or STEMI heart attacks have poorer outcomes.

The process of getting patients to the right hospital where they receive the right care at the right time is referred to as time critical diagnosis.

Medical professionals who developed the regulations will be on hand at each regional meeting to explain how the new system of care for stroke and heart attack patients would work.

Tonight's forum will be followed by a meeting Wednesday in Cape Girardeau and additional meetings in St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, and Kirksville from Oct. 1 through 7.

All interested parties are welcome to attend. Comments and suggested changes in the regulations will be accepted in writing and online at the same link above. All comments will be considered in developing the final regulations.

Health professionals consider the new system a major step forward in treating both heart disease and stroke, which remain Missouri's No. 1 and No. 3 causes of death, respectively.

The TCD system would integrate care for stroke and STEMI patients with the current Missouri trauma system. Medical facilities across Missouri would be able to apply for designation as a stroke or STEMI center. The Department of Health and Senior Services

would assign a level of specialization to centers depending on the level of care each facility is staffed and equipped to provide.

When the regulations go into effect in 2010, ambulance crews throughout the state would transport stroke and STEMI patients to the facility able to provide the most appropriate care. By ensuring timely treatment for stroke and STEMI patients the new system would improve recovery times, reduce complications and save lives.

Missouri is the first state in the nation to enact legislation creating a statewide system of care for STEMI and stroke that is modeled after the care provided for trauma patients. The TCD system was developed under the direction of the Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force. First launched in 2003, the initiative was led by the Department of Health and Senior Services in collaboration and funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health.

Later, funding was also provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Throughout 2007 and 2008, the initiative brought together more than 200 of Missouri's top emergency medical care experts and others committed to improving health outcomes. In 2008, legislation expanded the health department's authority to implement regulations to improve care for heart disease and stroke patients.

Margaret Donnelly, director of the Department of Health and Senior Services, said TCD teams met for the past year to develop the proposed regulations and devise approaches on ways to put the system into practice. The teams emphasized consideration of the needs of individual communities.

"The Department of Health and Senior Services, the Missouri Foundation for Health and many participating individuals and organizations have worked diligently to ensure these regulations best meet the needs of Missouri citizens and facilitate the highest quality of care for patients," Donnelly said. "After years of development, we are excited to hold these regional meetings and to unveil this innovative initiative to improve care for stroke and STEMI patients."

Source:
Missouri Department Of Health And Senior Services